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R E P O R T

OF

JOHN Y. FOSTER, Esq.,

ON

THE WAR HISTORY

OF

NEW JERSEY.

FOR THE YEAR 1866.

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REPORT
ON
THE WAR HISTORY.

His Excellency Marcus L. Ward, Governor, &c. :

SIR:—At your request, I submit herewith a statement of the progress of the proposed History of New Jersey's part in the late war, the preparation of which you honored me by committing to my hands.

Immediately upon my appointment as historiographer in April last, I addressed myself to the collection of materials for the work, opening communication with our principal officers and other persons supposed to be in possession of valuable or essential facts as to the operations of our soldiers, and soliciting, through the press, the delivery into my hands of private letters and all documents calculated to facilitate the completion of the undertaking. As the result of this effort, and of personal interviews with officers and privates of our regiments, I have accumulated a vast mass of letters, narratives, diaries, order and dispatch-books, and other documents, embodying most important facts, and in some cases complete records, of the services of our troops. These papers, however, relate to but a portion, perhaps one-half, of the whole number of regiments sent by us into the field. As to many of the others, I have been unable as yet to obtain any satisfactory statements, and as to a few it would seem that only the most meagre and imperfect sketches can be anticipated—the most persistent and thorough search having failed to discover any data whatever in reference to their actual experience. It may seem incredible, but it is nevertheless true, that some of the regiments failed altogether to make regular reports to the State authorities, while in a few instances reports were *never* made as required, except in so far as related to the merest routine life and proceedings. Nor is this all. The commandants of these regiments have no personal records at all relating to their operations. One would suppose that a natural pride in their commands, and a desire to perpetuate the evidences and memorials of their gallantry, would have induced in all officers a careful preservation of all papers, official and otherwise; and it must certainly be regarded as inexplicable that such was not the case. Those officers who, like Gen. McAllister and a few others, did thus faithfully fulfil their obligations to their commands in this particular, have most generously volunteered all possible assistance in the completion of the work which has fallen to my hands; but as to the regiments of

which there are, so far as yet discovered, no trustworthy records in existence, the task of producing any accurate or complete history must, obviously, be one of slow and difficult progress.

The act of the Legislature under which the work is authorized, requires the preparation of "a succinct history of the part borne by New Jersey in the war, of the services of her general officers, and of the campaigns of each regiment." Whether, under this general provision, it was designed to include a narrative of all the events, social, religious and political, which marked the inner life of our people during the progress of the struggle, may perhaps be questioned; but it was so palpably essential to a complete record of our services in the national behalf, that everything relating to the home-side of the conflict—the philanthropy and generous, inflexible patriotism of the masses, the action of our State administrations, and the conspicuous performances of particular men—should be faithfully set forth, that I determined at once to make the history, as far as possible, an exhaustive and complete exposition of New Jersey's work, from the beginning to the close of the war. Accordingly, I have endeavored to procure, from official papers and other sources not ordinarily accessible, such facts as exhibit the character and magnitude of our contributions in promotion of the moral and sanitary comfort of our troops; the amount of local and State appropriations in the way of bounties; the number of volunteers from this State who served in the regiments of other States; the general drift and influence of the policy of our religious bodies; the effect upon the general prosperity of the withdrawal from the producing classes of so many thousands of skilled operatives; together with an analysis of the legislation of the war period, and the general attitude of the people touching the questions which the war developed. This portion of the work is, to my mind, quite as important as the military narrative, and at any rate its omission would leave the State without any adequate or reliable record of the noble part it performed, to which to point with satisfaction in the hereafter.

The actual present condition of the work is as follows: I have complete, or nearly so, the narrative of the three months' brigade, including, of course preliminary chapters as to the condition of the State upon the outbreak of hostilities, and its early action in response to the first call for troops—making in all some 150 manuscript pages; a complete history of the Ninth Regiment, 160 pages; the 1st Cavalry, nearly complete, 250 pages: the Twelfth Regiment, down to the siege of Petersburg; the Eleventh Regiment, with all the official papers of Gen. McAllister; the Fifteenth Regiment, nearly complete; the Twenty-fifth, Twentieth-seventh and Twenty-ninth Regiments, complete except as to the Twenty-fifth; and some 250 manuscript pages of reports, letters, orders, &c., relating to the Fifth, Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Regiments, with some detached sketches also of the First and Third Regiments of the First Brigade. In addition to all this, I have arranged for sketches of the Thirteenth and Thirty-third Regi-

ments, having already the official papers of the latter in my possession, kindly furnished by Gen. Mindel, who still feels a deep interest in our New Jersey troops. I have also the records of Beam's Battery, and in course of preparation a narrative of the experiences of the Jersey volunteers, some twelve hundred in number, who were connected with Sickles's Excelsior Brigade.

You will discover from this statement that the work promises to be one of formidable proportions. Under any circumstances, it seems impossible to reduce the volume to less than nine hundred or a thousand pages, unless the smaller styles of type are used, which would to many entirely destroy its value. You will also readily conjecture that the completion of the work may occupy the greater part of the coming year, if continued upon the plan now proposed. Should the Legislature authorize an abridgement of the regimental histories, as I beg respectfully to suggest, and the substitution of brigade narratives so far as may be possible, then the volume may be diminished in bulk and completed at an earlier day than now seems possible, and without at all impairing the value of the work. Many of our regiments having had precisely the same experience, the record of one will give all the essential facts as to the services of others, and to repeat in each case the same statement of camp and field life and operations would only swell the volume to unwieldy proportions without increasing its interest or accuracy. As exhibiting the extent to which the regimental style of narrative would expand the book, I may mention that the War History of Iowa (which State furnished forty infantry and nine cavalry regiments, with several batteries of artillery), prepared upon this plan, occupies 743 closely printed pages, and is by no means exhaustive or complete.

It is proper to say that the New Jersey Historical Society have generously placed all the resources of their library at my disposal, and extended me other facilities, in the preparation of the work. Their example is worthy of enlarged recognition by other societies.

Thanking you for the judicious counsel and active assistance you have given me in the prosecution of my labor and trusting that they may be completed to your satisfaction and that the people at large.

I remain, with high consideration,

Yours, &c.,

JOHN Y. FOSTER.

TRENTON, December 24, 1866.

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